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Israel: Old Ally, Old Snoop

By James Bamford

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Christine Esfandiari did not know what to do. Anne, her next door neighbor, had just handed her a wedding album and asked her to keep it safe. Now Anne was imploring her to help get rid of a suitcase hidden under the stair of their Washington apartment building. The young woman pleaded with her to retrieve the case and meet at the Four Seasons Hotel. A short while later Esfandiari's husband brought the heavy case to the apartment but, after a sleepless night, decided to call Navy investigators.

Inside the suitcase was a pile of wrinkled documents bearing an assortment of red classification stamps ranging from secret to top-secret code words. This was only a fraction of the mountain of defense secrets Jonathan Jay Pollard and his wife, Anne Henderson-Pollard, had sold to the government of Israel—roughly, 864,000 pages total. According to Joseph E. di Genova, the U.S. attorney who prosecuted the case, the Pollards had "compromised the most documents ever."

That the nation's record for spying would be achieved not by the Soviet KGB but an ally working through a religious zealot is both disturbing and frightening. Especially so, given Israel's continuing cover-up of its involvement in the espionage operation. Nevertheless, from a historical perspective, these incidents are only the latest in a series of actions against the United States by Israel.

W. Raymond Wannall, who ran the Middle East desk of the FBI's intelligence division in the late 1940s and early 1950s, remembers that even then the Israelis "were very extensively involved in gathering information of a classified nature in this country." Nonetheless, he said, the Justice Department decided not to prosecute. Wannall, who retired in 1976 as assistant FBI director in charge of intelligence, called the Israeli spy network

"very organized," run by a secret four-man panel: "One of the members of the board was at the United Nations, a second was at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, a third was a prominent industrialist in New York City and a fourth was a trouble-shooter who came back and forth from Israel."

In 1979, the Central Intelligence Agency produced a secret, highly restricted report on Israeli intelligence activity, "Israel: Foreign Intelligence and Security Services." The report has been cited in

the media but the CIA refuses to confirm or deny its sponsorship. The study reflects a long-standing resentment and distrust within the CIA. This view, shared by many in the agency, in part stems from a widespread agency belief that Israel's military and intelligence services can commit any action without being held to account.

The report would suggest that the Israeli government has long viewed the United States as an adversary to be subverted rather than as a friend and patron. Among friendly countries, there has always been a gentleman's agreement that passive, non-intrusive espionage—such as by satellite—is permissible. For example, the United States has for years eavesdropped on British diplomatic communications and the British no doubt reciprocate.

Off-limits, however, is active spying, such as planting a mole in the friend's intelligence service or enticing a government employee to commit treason. Yet this is precisely what Israel has done. The CIA report claims that the United States ranks just below the Arab states on Israel's list of priority targets.

But most troublesome, according to the CIA study, is Israel's use of dual loyalty as a tool for espionage, as in the Pollard case. Despite a reported ban on the recruitment of foreign Jews for espionage, "The Israelis," says the CIA report, "are prepared to capitalize on nearly every kind of agent motivation. A substantial effort is made to appeal to Jewish racial or religious proclivities, pro-Zionism, dislike of anti-Semitism . . . blackmail is also used. Other recruiting techniques include the proffer of money." In addition, "Mosad [Israel's CIA] over the years has enjoyed some rapport with highly placed persons and government offices in every country of importance to Israel. Within Jewish communities in almost every country of the world, there are Zionists and other sympathizers, who render strong support to the Israeli intelligence effort. Such contacts are carefully nurtured and serve as channels for information, deception material, propaganda and other purposes."

The report goes further: "The Israeli intelligence service depends heavily on the various Jewish communities and organizations abroad for recruiting agents and eliciting general information. The aggressively ideological nature of Zionism, which emphasizes that all Jews belong to Israel and must return to Israel, had had its drawbacks in enlisting support for intelligence operations, however, since there is considerable opposition to Zionism among Jews throughout the world. Aware of this fact, Israeli intelligence representatives usually operate

discreetly, within Jewish communities and are under instructions to handle their missions with utmost tact to avoid embarrassment to Israel. They also attempt to penetrate anti-Zionist elements in order to neutralize the opposition. Despite such precautions, the Israelis frequently experience setbacks and there have been several cases where attempts at recruitment of Americans of the Jewish faith have been rejected and reported to U.S. authorities."

Perhaps the 1979 CIA had its own prejudices but since the Pollards' arrest last November, Israel has done little to counteract agency beliefs. On the one hand Israelis say the affair was an unsanctioned "rogue" operation, that those responsible will be "brought to account," that they will "spare no effort to investigate this case." Yet, the Israelis awarded those responsible with promotions, lied to the U.S. Justice Department and covered up the involvement of Pollard's principal handler. Finally, last week, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir reluctantly appointed a two-man panel to investigate the Pollard case.

The time is overdue for the Reagan Administration and Congress to consider calling in Israel's credit cards and begin a realistic reassessment of America's relationship in the Middle East. □

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